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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (10/17): "STALEMATE" IN  
FATAH-HAMAS UNITY TALKS

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Main Stories:  
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The three dailies lead with condemnations by the Palestinian Authority (PA) President's office of three separate killings of Palestinians, two by Israeli soldiers and one by settlers, in the past week. The killings all occurred in the Ramallah area of the West Bank, with the third Palestinian being shot dead by Israeli soldiers on October 16. PA Presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeinneh called on Israel and the international community to halt the Israeli "aggression."

In lead photo coverage, all dailies run front page photos of damage to a Palestinian's car after "Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian olive farms." Al Ayyam highlights a large photo of Israeli "settlers illegally" roaming about the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem on October 15, under Israeli security escort. Al Hayat Al Jadida also leads with a photo from the October 16 funeral of a young Palestinian killed by Israeli soldiers.

Al Quds and Al Ayyam run front page stories about photos from 1948 that were recently released by Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot, showing Israeli soldiers leading an elderly Palestinian to his death. Al Ayyam publishes the story on a black background, denoting the grim nature of the news, while Al Hayat Al Jadida runs a similar story on an inside page.

All papers report that Democratic presidential hopeful Obama has taken the lead in polls, but is warning supporters not to become over-confident. The news is part of front page coverage in Al Quds and Al Ayyam about the latest presidential debates. Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida publish photos from the debate on inside pages and the latter also runs excerpts focused on candidates' comments on the economy.

The front pages present conflicting reports on Israel's readiness to accept Hamas' terms for the release of kidnapped Israeli soldier Shalit from Gaza. Israeli Defense Ministry official Amos Gilad is quoted denying that Israel has accepted Hamas' terms. In related news, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page reports that Gilad and Egypt's President Mubarak discussed on October 12, the extension of the 6-month calm agreement between Hamas and Israel when it expires in December. Finally, Al Quds' front page reports that Hamas awaits the Egyptian response to its proposal for direct talks with Fatah in Cairo and calls upon Palestinian Authority President Abbas to, "silence voices opposing national unity."

One in three Palestinian families live in poverty according to statistics recently released by the Palestinian Authority Bureau of Statistics, as reported on Al Quds' front page. The statistics also reveal a rise in overall poverty rates in the Palestinian Territories.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida report that PLO negotiation chief Sa'eb Erekat announced that PA President Abbas will not meet with Israel's Premier Olmert as stated earlier, but that preparations for a meeting are on-going.

Al Ayyam runs a front page AFP story about international calls for the implementation of a new financial system, as the global financial crises deepens.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

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¶1. Former Palestinian Authority Minister Hasan Asfour opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "National dialogue: Interim or final solution?" (10/17): "The current situation requires that there be a comprehensive document that provides answers... [to] the issues of electoral law and mechanisms... [such as] the Legislative Council or PLO as tools to bring the Palestinian arena back into balance. The security issue remains a basic issue to resolve..."

¶2. Al Quds editorial is titled, "What is the way out of this vicious circle?" (10/17): "Egypt presented an initiative that was accepted by [Fatah and Hamas]...so why is this initiative now facing a stale-mate?... Is it because the initiative requires direct dialogue between the two movements?... The media have reported that Fatah rejects direct dialogue with Hamas, because in the past... Hamas has violated agreements... Fatah has the right to have reservations and seek Arab guarantees..... but not to totally reject direct dialogue"

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